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More Protective Clean Air Standards Announced

BATON ROUGE - The United States Environmental Protection Agency released a report today on its more protective national clean air standards. The report designated areas that were not in attainment for new eight-hour ozone standards.

In Louisiana, only the five-parish Baton Rouge area fell short of the new, more stringent eight-hour ozone standard. The EPA lists that area as marginal, which is the lowest ranking.

The eight-hour ozone standard is based on an eight-hour rolling average and three complete years of data.

Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Mike McDaniel was pleased with the report.

"This important standard is designed to protect public health," he said. "There were no surprises with the eight-hour standard. We all, industry, the community and DEQ, have to continue to work and meet the eight-hour standard for the Baton Rouge area."

Ozone is not emitted, it is caused by a series of chemical reactions that take place in the presence of sunlight on hot days when the air is stagnant and there is little or no wind. Two precursors to ozone are volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides. Utilities, cars, trucks, buses, ships, airplanes and certain industries release one or both of these ozone components.

The one-hour ozone standard is still in effect and must be attained in the five-parish Baton Rouge area. However, for the eight-hour standard, EPA classified the area as marginal – the lowest classification.

"All the pollution reduction work we have done in the past few years has paid us great dividends in reducing eight-hour ozone," McDaniel said. "This is important because this new standard is a better measure of human exposure which is related to health effects."